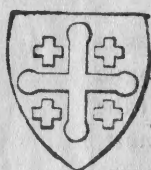


Price 1d.

Series 2. Pamphlet No. 17.



## The League of Nations Union.

President VISCOUNT GREY OF FALLODON, K.G.

A British Organisation founded to promote the formation of a World League of Free Peoples for the securing of International Justice, Mutual Defence, and Permanent Peace.

22, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W. 1.

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# THE CHURCH AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

BY

DAVID DAVIES, M.P.

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THERE is a wide-spread belief in many quarters that the Church has lost her hold upon humanity, and that more and more, as time goes on, mankind is drifting into the religion of materialism. The god of Mammon can be worshipped with the same devotion as the God of Christianity. Man must have a religion of some kind—the sense of worship is part of his being, and he cannot divest himself of it, though it may take different forms. The savage has some vague glimmerings of the supernatural, crude as they may be. At the other end of the scale we find the keen scientist, the avowed agnostic, who, nevertheless in his innermost mind is a devotee of some creed or other. Even the criminal has some pet form of devotion.

Some years ago this instinct was depicted in "False Gods," a translation of a French play, which clearly showed how necessary to all nations and classes of mankind was some form of religion or creed, and how the various systems of conduct which had grown up in different stages of civilisation, were based upon an appreciation of the requirements of existence. Now the War has come to an end and the chief necessity of humanity will find its expression.

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in some form of organisation which will, so far as is humanly possible, prevent wars in the future—in a League of Nations, and in a policy of general disarmament. If the Church is to become once again a living force she must, therefore, become the exponent and champion of these ideas.

The advent of this terrible War affected religious creeds in various ways and in opposite directions. It has quickened the devotion of some people, whereas it has had quite the contrary effect on others. These are questions which have caused doubt in many people's minds. How could the Almighty allow the world to be tortured in this way? Why have the innocent been allowed to become victims of unrestrained passions? Why all the bloodshed, the lust, the hate, the cruelty undreamt of before the War? Why all these tragedies multiplied a millionfold, if there is really a Divine Providence guiding the destinies of mankind? But surely there is another side to the picture! When has the world seen so much self-sacrifice and chivalry, such heroism and valour, such devotion to duty and to the sacred cause of Right? All these grand qualities and noble deeds have illuminated the dark pages of the last four years.

Therefore we need not despair if for the moment the religion of Christ and the message which He gave to the world, acknowledged by believer and unbeliever alike to be the purest and highest standard of conduct offered to mankind, has suffered a set-back. The Church has attempted an answer, but has the time yet come when she can give a complete one? The Russian Mujik, having emancipated himself, as he fondly believes, from the old faith of his fathers, is now sorely perplexed. He is groping about in the dark with no beacon to guide him. In France, there was a temporary religious revival at the beginning of the War, but as the struggle dragged on and the Vatican failed to identify itself with the cause of Liberty, there has been a reaction to materialism. The people of Italy,



and the Slavs, have lost their old landmarks. Are not the same forces at work in our own country, and will not the doubts and questions spread from one end of the world to the other? Will not the religious ideas of our enemies, of the stolid German Protestant, and of the Austrian Catholic, change because of this cataclysm? Will they not all join in a chorus of despair? Will they not all demand a new and revised version of Christianity?

This is the Church's opportunity. Will she take it? Will she rise to the occasion? Will she point to the goal? Will she cast away all reservations and throw herself into the fray? Will she rest until the ideal is achieved, so that to future generations her teachers will be able to point the moral? Will they be able to explain the handwriting on the wall, to expound the Divine purpose, to prove that out of the greatest calamity, the most austere trial the world has ever suffered, a great good resulted and noble triumphs were won? Will they be able to demonstrate that, having flung away at last the claims of prejudice and rivalry, mankind returned to its creator and that once again the Universal Church lived? Will it not be truthfully said that if the Church loses this opportunity, our profession of religion is a sham and an illusion? If she hesitates to put the Gospel first, last, and all the time in the forefront, if she seeks, for selfish purposes, to place the nation before the nations, if the Church is to be the tool of the State, then indeed will the people have finally lost all confidence in the message of the Church and we shall inevitably relapse into the barbarism of past ages. What then is the goal? What is the land of promise? What is the special mission? What is the Holy Crusade? What is to be the vindication of the faith in these days of fire and sword?

It is to be found in the establishment of a new world order which will substitute reason for force, and arbitration for the clash of arms. This cannot be done until all peoples are brought to realise that war is an immoral proceeding. They must all be aroused to will the means and the methods

whereby wars may be made impossible in the future. If this War issues in a great spiritual revival amongst all the peoples, breaking down the barriers of race and creed, of national egotism and pride, then may we not hope that, in spite of all the suffering and sorrow, of all the blood and tears, it may yet be transformed into one of the greatest blessings that the world has ever known?

But these drastic reforms can only be brought about if the nations approach each other in a spirit of goodwill; and it is impossible to eliminate the hate which has been engendered during the last four years unless we are prepared to educate ourselves. No settlement will be permanent unless it is based upon the moral sanction of all the communities, and unless the new doctrines are to receive the general assent of all the peoples involved. It is in this process of enlightenment and education that the Church can play a great part. But let us not delude ourselves, as some people do, by thinking that we can achieve our ideals without sacrifices. The policy of defeatism, or of negotiating a peace which does not give guarantees for the prevention of future wars, is not in accordance with the sublime principles of Christianity. When the issues at stake are vital to the moral progress of the human race, compromise is unthinkable. Sacrifice for an ideal, and for the Right, is the watchword of the New Testament. Therefore it is wrong to suppose that the Christian churches are failing in their duty if they do not demand a patched-up peace. On the contrary, by so doing, they would be betraying their trust. The duty of the Church lies rather in the purification of our war-aims, and in preparing the minds of her followers for a righteous reconstruction of the world. Above all, she should insist that the new structure should be based upon the principles of Christianity. There are dark forces at work which will impede the progress and development of a League of Nations. They are the barriers of national rivalries, of competing armaments, of material prosperity, of personal



ambitions, all of which stand entrenched in the traditions and prejudices of the past. Let us be quite clear on one point. There can be no permanent peace unless all the nations of the world agree to general disarmament. This is the crux of the whole question. Complete disarmament involves the establishment of an international police force, which means that the nations have resolved to pool their resources in order to maintain law and order amongst themselves.

I do not believe that there is any half-way house between general disarmament and ultimate war. If a man is always carrying a weapon about with him, he will certainly use it sooner or later. He becomes a menace to his neighbour, who is forced to arm himself in self-defence. The only sure safeguard is to deprive him of the weapon and to hand it over to the policeman. As Judge Wadhams said recently :—

“When you see a constable you behold the incarnation of the Magna Charta and the British Constitution.”

Similarly, an international policeman can become the reincarnation of an international Magna Charta and of a League of Nations constitution. In no walk of life is scientific competition so keen as in the development and perfecting of our man-killing organisations and machines. In the first place, they involve the existence of a military caste, or profession, whose sole business in life is to prepare for the next war. For a time they may be held in check by the civil population, but sooner or later they are bound to have their fling. They regard the prospect of war—probably because they have had little or no actual experience of it—with positive enthusiasm. War means to them an opportunity for rendering service to their country; it spells rapid promotion; it is always someone else who is going to be killed; there will be a chance of becoming distinguished and famous, and of playing an important role in the public eye. These remarks apply, of

course, only to the professional or permanent soldiers, and it is only natural that they should desire to influence public opinion in favour of warlike preparations. Nor can they be blamed for doing so, it is part of their job. In an autocratic and highly disciplined country this military machine is bound to exercise tremendous influence upon the minds of the people and upon politics. Its efforts in this direction are ably seconded by the activity of the great armament firms whose existence and prosperity in the long run depend upon war, and upon creating the panics which from time to time spur the nations to redouble their efforts and hasten their preparations for the fray. All these people, therefore, have vested interests in maintaining armaments on a huge scale. It is quite useless to talk of limiting armaments. It is possible that this may be done for a short period, but in the long run the spirit of rivalry and competition is bound to get the upper hand. The best illustration of the working out of these ideas is to be found in the history of Germany before the War. In lesser degrees they operated in all countries, and history teaches us that these military organisations and systems, whether offensive or defensive in their origin, have always ended in war. I repeat, therefore, that general disarmament is the only sure preventative of war.

It may be argued that every state will need a force to maintain internal order within its own boundaries. This requirement may be met by the establishment of a national guard or militia, armed only with rifles and possibly machine guns, strictly limited in numbers; and in proportion to the population of each individual state. America, before entering the War, was organised on this basis, though in addition to her national guard she maintained a powerful fleet and a small standing army. The scientific development of the great engines of war during recent years, renders the task of differentiating between the national guard and the international police force comparatively an easy one. All the great weapons, the

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artillery, mortars, bombs, high explosives, poison gas apparatus, military aeroplanes, tanks, submarines, and other ships of war should be handed over to the Police force of the League of Nations. This force, composed of trained and professional soldiers, and armed with the most modern and destructive of weapons, would so completely overshadow any national guard or militia as to make it impossible for any nation to go to war. Besides, it would have to be laid down as one of the chief conditions that no great armament or munition factories should be allowed to continue in any country other than those under international control. It is submitted that this is a practical scheme and one which can be carried out, provided that every nation agrees to come in. This is the reason why the War had to be continued until the German people agreed to accept these principles, and to give adequate guarantees that they are prepared to carry them out. But are our own people prepared to translate these ideas into practice? If all the countries in the world can be persuaded to give their assent to a world reconstruction based on disarmament, are we ready to join without any reservation? Are we prepared to go still further? Are we willing to stand up and to advocate these proposals? Are we willing to take the trouble of educating ourselves, and of sacrificing our national pride by proclaiming our readiness to apply this procedure to ourselves? We may be quite sure that unless steps are taken now to educate our people and to enlist the good offices of our Allies in the project, the goal will not be reached, nor shall we reap the harvest, after all the sacrifice and suffering of this War.

If the psychological moment is allowed to pass by, mankind may go down the ladder rung by rung. New generations will grow up who know not war nor its horrors, and the old race for competitive armaments will start once more. Now is the acceptable time, when every nation in the world is reeling from the blow, when the Angel of Death has entered every household and thousands of homes



lie ruined, when from every land the cry goes up in the Prime Minister's words : " Never Again !"

Then at that moment it may well be that the message of Bethlehem, the dream of the philosophers, may come true. Is it not possible that the process of enlightenment and the growth of international organisation will have advanced more rapidly in a few years than it has hitherto done in the course of centuries?

This is the Church's opportunity. Will she play her part in the culmination of this holy crusade? Will she, rising above all national prejudice and interest, consecrate the fruits of victory for the permanent uplifting of humanity? Will she vindicate in this crisis the everlasting principles which her Founder dedicated to the world? Will she proclaim to the German people the God of the New Testament? Will she confound their trust and confidence in the god of war?

Let the Christian Church champion once more the teachings of her Founder, and prepare for the advent of a League of Nations which shall guarantee the peace of the world for all time.

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Excerpts from PRESIDENT WILSON'S State Papers, June 6th, 1917:—

*A. Alexandre Ribot, Former Premier of France.*

" It is necessary that a League of Peace be founded in the same spirit of democracy that France has had the honour of introducing into the world. The nations now in arms will constitute the Society of Nations. This is the future of humanity, or one might well despair of the future. President Wilson upon this point is with us. All nations not predatory must unite to prevent others from disturbing the peace. They must unite in an armed league to make respected throughout the world, peace, justice and liberty.

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Edited and Published by Mr. W. L. Williams, Press and Literature Secretary of THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS UNION, at their Head Offices, 22, Buckingham Gate, London, S.W. 1; and printed by THE NATIONAL PRESS AGENCY LIMITED, at Whitefriars House, Carmelite Street, London, E.C. 4.

